

The 2018 Paddle to Puyallup on "String Games"

This year's Tribal Journey was the Paddle to Puyallup. The Blue Heron Canoe Family needed a support boat. We were game. So off Jim and I went with Sailor Dog Rudi.

Rudi is almost 16 but he starts bouncing when he sees his life vest.

The canoes followed a variety of routes to Puyallup. Blue Heron's route began at Neah Bay on Washington's northwest corner on July 16. Other canoes started in the Columbia River in Washington, on the outer coast of British Columbia, or in the Straits of Georgia or Puget Sound. Eventually, 120 canoes would land at Puyallup for a week of intense cultural exchange.

We started out at Olympia, the southern tip of Puget Sound, planning to meet up with Blue Heron around Port Angeles. We stopped for the night at Dockton on Maury Island (where Josh and Gavin joined us for dinner), Kingston on the Kitsap Peninsula, and Port Townsend.



At Port Townsend the marina was unusually full. We followed someone else's lead and tied up to the fuel dock after hours. Next morning we learned why the marina was jammed. Salmon season had just opened for non-Natives. And the Natives, though not constrained by fishery seasons in the same way, were just as focused on their harvest. We watched from our perch by the fuel dock as pickup trucks backed trailers down the boat ramp to launch small boats piled high with crab pots.

We had an embarrassing moment as we prepared to leave. The throttle/gear on



String Games stuck in neutral. We drifted toward other vessels, expensive possibilities looming! At the last moment Jim muscled the lever into gear and got the boat under control. But it was clear we needed repairs before joining Blue Heron. When we arrived in Port Angeles, we wasted no time in finding a mechanic. Eric was able to rebuild the throttle, saving us the cost and time to get a new throttle/gear.

The two days for repair gave us time to explore Port Angeles. Once a booming town, Port Angeles started looking pretty seedy in the last part of the 1900's when logging, milling, and fishing declined. Still, there's a certain rough charm along with a sense of whimsy.

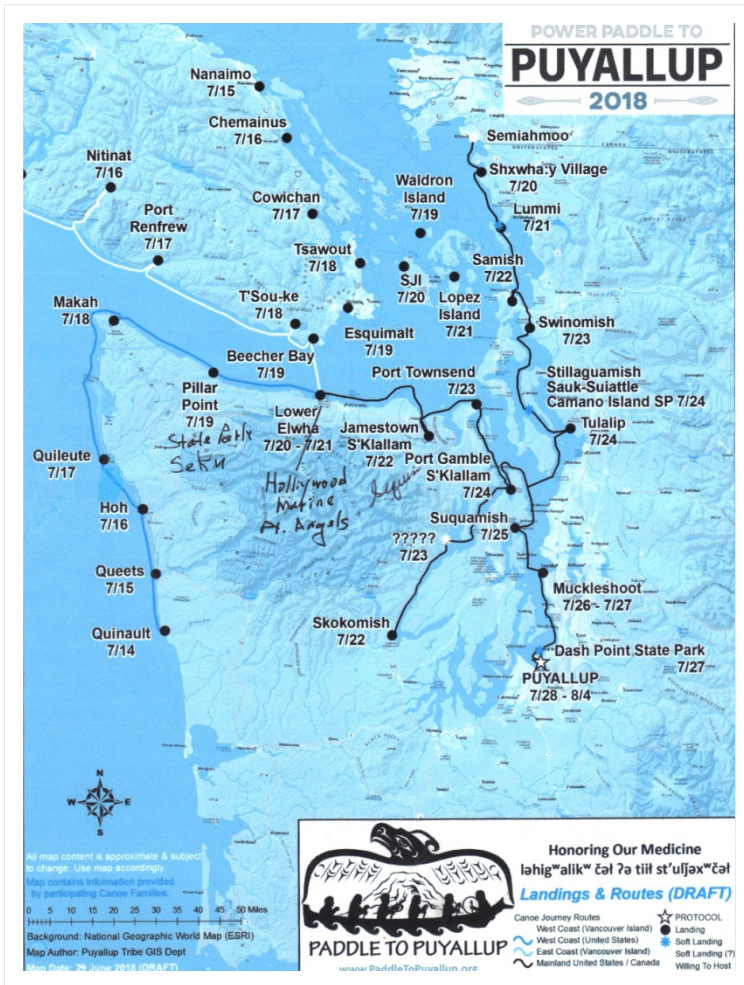


In the middle of town we found a piano set up in a small square. Every now and then, someone wanders over to plink out a tune.

A wonderful mural depicts the "Kalakala," an Art Deco ferry boat much loved for its design but not for its bumpy ride. I saw it in its dotage on Kodiak Island, AK, where it had been turned into a fish cannery.

Take a close look:
Are the dog and children
flesh and blood, or they part
of the mural?





Our throttle fixed, we were ready to take up our duties as a support boat. What does a support boat do? Our usual job is to be within eyesight of the canoe to provide help when needed. A puller who gets tired or ill can come aboard and switch places with a fresh puller riding along with us.

If the weather is rough, support boats can tow canoes. In an emergency, a support boat races to the rescue. This year's paddle was thankfully free of disasters.

Ironically, the only emergency was that Jim became ill with a reoccurrence of severe vertigo. Friend Bernie Brady drove up to Port Angeles and

took Jim and Rudi back home.

Lucky for me, son Josh was available. His wife Julie drove him up to Port Angeles. Meantime, I went to Hollywood Beach south of the ferry docks to watch the canoes come in from Pysht (Pillar Point). That trip of 31 miles was their longest pull of the journey.

Blue Heron was built by Mike Evans, the canoe



“father,” standing in the stern. When conditions are right, Blue Heron can use a sail as shown here.

I caught a ride out to the Lower Elwah reservation to assure Mike that even though Jim had left, *String Games* would with Josh’s help support the canoe. I spoke more bravely than I felt! And I enjoyed a wonderful picnic dinner prepared by the casino kitchen.



Next day Julie dropped Josh off at the marina in Port Angeles. His sister Bridget, a Blue Heron Canoe Family member, gave us a ride out to camp. Dinner was not provided that night but we were able to observe impromptu singing and dancing. Back at the boat, we dined on Japanese curry that Josh had brought along.

String Games cast off early the next morning, July 22, to meet up with the canoe inside Ediz Hook. We followed Blue Heron along the Straits of Juan de Fuca to Jamestown near Sequim. With us were two passengers who spent several days with us off and on. One was Larry Blair, who has a strong interest in Native American issues and has studied Lushootseed, the language of the Salish Sea. The other was Janice Hicks Bullchild, a member of the Nisqually Tribe. Larry helped with navigation and the helm. Janice watched out for crab pots.

We tied *String Games* up at the John Wayne Marina (hosts picking up the tab) and accepted a ride in Mike’s pickup truck to the



campground for dinner. The S’Klallams put on a superb meal. Pullers rested and participated in ritual “protocol,” during which groups take turns sharing their dances, songs, and stories. This was generally the schedule along the journey.



We had a chance to visit with Bridget at Blue Heron’s camp. Bridget has led the “Green Team” managing recycling, waste, and composting for many journeys. This year the hosting Puyallup Tribe hired her to provide green practices at their site. Bridget is the reason our granddaughter Kiki paddled to Cowichan some years ago, and we served as a support boat to Bella Bella in Canada in 2014.

July 22 the canoes pushed on to Port Townsend where they camped at the county fairgrounds. It was a pull of 18 miles, not very long for these experienced people. However, the wind was strong and little whitecaps occasionally flicked the water.



As we approached Protection Island along the way, we watched Blue Heron strike a different direction than most of the canoes. Instead of taking the north side of the island, the canoe went to the south. We wondered why. Eventually we heard radio chatter that some canoes on the north side were being blown toward the treacherous rocky island, and support boats had to pull them away. This was one of the many times that we were impressed by Blue Heron’s skipper and crew.

Skipper most days was Logan, a Native American from California. That’s him in the red vest. He is Mike’s understudy, and clearly has Mike’s full confidence. This gives Mike time to attend to the many logistics involved in the canoe journey.



Here, Blue Heron is approaching Port Townsend.



At Port Townsend the canoe families camped a bit out of town, at the Jefferson County Fairgrounds. We tied up *String Games* at Point Hudson for the night and went exploring—it turned out Josh had never been to this charming city!

Then we had all night to worry about the next leg of our trip, through the Port Townsend Ship Canal. Would we be able to pass beneath the bridge? Our mast is 51 feet 7 inches not including the weather vane and antennas. The bridge is 58 feet above mean high tide. The tide was a double high tide, not double high but two high tides in a row. It was predicted to raise the water above sea level by 10 feet.



How did mean high tide relate to sea level? I was at sea trying to figure this out. Help was at hand: Randy, skipper of the support sailboat Sparrow, squinted at the sky and said, “You should make it.” Still, we had doubts especially when the people

standing on the bridge began screaming, “The mast, the mast!” The three folks on board hung over the port gunwale, and I leaned from the helm. We may have lowered ourselves an extra foot without need. In any case, we sailed through without mishap.

Our destination was Port Gamble, home of S’Klallams, after a 23-mile pull. No docks there, but after a tutorial from Rod Tharp of the support catamaran “Pax” Josh and I anchored easily. Host skiffs ferried us to shore, where we found a seafood feast cooking on the beach. Crab, venison, salmon, shellfish...



The formal landing at Port Gamble showed that the number of canoes had continued to climb and was now about 60 from the 11 or so at Port Angeles.



Canoe representatives gave their customary requests to come ashore, rest, and meet with the hosts. We were proud that Logan made his request first in Lushootseed, then in English, in a loud and confident voice.

On the way to dinner at the tribal center, we visited the Blue Heron's campground. We saw Karen frying bacon for breakfast the next day, Janice calling her daughter who would later join us, and others taking much needed rest. We learned that Blue Heron's thin crew needed a day off and



would go overland to Suquamish the next day, so Josh and I could make other plans. Then, back to the boat but...how? It turned out the hosts had made no



plans to return people to support boats. We were the only ones without a ride. We waited awhile, seeing no one else around. Then a strapping young woman ran past us, throwing her sweater onto the sand. She dove into the water, swam out to a fishing skiff, climbed in, and started hoisting the anchor. It appeared

she was going to load it onto the trailer her father was backing down the boat ramp. We called out, Academia (for that turned out to be her name) said, "Sure," and her dad Benjy concurred. Within a few minutes she deposited us back on *String*

Games. We learned along the way that Academia and her master chef dad supplied three venison and hundreds of pounds of seafood for the beach feast.

String Games ducked into Kingston and docked for the first time EVER in the reciprocal slip offered by the Kingston Yacht Club. The tab was \$4.00 for electrical hookup, that's all. We found good food at the Kingston Ale House and were ready bright and early the next day to meet our



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Then we escorted Blue Heron to Alki in West Seattle. By now the number of canoes was so large that it was hard to keep track of our canoe. The white gunwales helped us spot her. So did the blue flag of a blackfish (orca) in the center of the canoe. Tense times ensued as we twice crossed the major north/south Puget Sound shipping lane. Nine-hundred-foot barges that appeared very small on the horizon loomed immense minutes later. Radio coordination between the barge captain and support vessels helped to create “holes” for barges to pass between the canoes and support boats spread across the Sound.



Josh and I tied *String Games* up at Elliott Bay Marina with the other support boats.

In the morning, we found that two huge cruise liners had moored in the bay.

With 120 canoes on the Alki beach, the launch took well over an hour. We

had a third opportunity to perfect our anchoring technique.

Even bigger boats, barges and tankers, plied the shipping lanes as we moved toward Commencement Bay. Once again we were proud of how Blue Heron navigated this dangerous territory. Some other canoes had to be towed to safety.

We left Blue Heron as the canoe approached Dash Point. Next day, July 28, would be a short pull of just three miles to the Puyallup landing site. Mike Evans released us, and Josh and I went to Dock Street Marina in Tacoma, preparing to catch the current south to Olympia the next day.

The iconic image, ever seared into our memories, is of this frail bark of ancient times in front of Seattle's 21st Century skyline.



Bonus Photos



Tacoma Narrows Bridge

article and photos by Emily Ray, except photos of her are by Jim Lengenfelder